

Klondike Glossary
Klondike Gold Rush NHP—Seattle Unit
Compiled by
Scott Eckberg, Park Ranger
1986

-A-

Adam's ale — water

Alaska Commercial Company (A.C.C., A.C. Co.) — successor to the Russian American Company, the ACC established a fur trade monopoly in Alaska following purchase in 1867 by acquiring sealing rights off the Priblof Islands. Trading posts were thereafter established along the Yukon River; trading emphasis shifted in 185 from furs to mining. (Adney: 237)

Alaska Exploration Company — one of three primary trading companies (after ACC and NAT&T) active in Dawson City during the rush, subsequent competition forced it to merge with the Alaska Commercial Company in 1901, to form the Northern Commercial Company. (Lynch: 300, 351)

Alaska feathers — spruce boughs cut and used as a camp bed. (Davis: 66)

Alaska Fever — the attraction of the territory that compelled men to return to live, work, and explore Alaska. (Chase: 186)

Alaska or Bust — slogan of those heading for the Klondike goldfields. Also “Klondike or Bust.” (McMichael: 17)

Alaskan strawberries — beans. (Jordan: 54)

Alaska Pack Asses — “Our common jest was that we all (stampeder afoot) belonged to the A.P.A.—the Alaska Pack Asses!” (Davis: 68)

All-American Route — primarily the Valdez or Copper River route to the interior of Alaska and the Yukon, secondarily, the so-called all-water or rich man's route via St. Michael and the Yukon River.

All-Canadian Route — primarily the undeveloped overland and main water routes via Edmonton to the Klondike, and the Telegraph Creek Trail via Ashcroft, advertised by Canadian merchants emphasizing the absence of customs duties at U.S. ports.

All in — physically exhausted.

All the go — popular, as in “all the rage.” (Wells: 13)

Alluvium — a sediment deposited by flowing water, as in a river bed, flood plain, or delta. Placer gold is found in alluvial deposits.

All-water route — the expensive, so-called rich man's route to Dawson City via coastal steamer to St. Michael, Alaska, thence up the Yukon to Dawson by steamboat. The route was long,

expensive, dangerous in part, and risky due to the brief Yukon navigation season. In addition some transportation companies required that outfits had to be purchased from the company beforehand, thus eliminating the passengers option to buy elsewhere.

“All you have to do is step off” – popular saying explaining how one reached Sheep Camp from the summit of Chilkoot Pass four miles above. (Burnham: 106)

Amalgam – substance consisting of gold and mercury, which form a bond during amalgamation.

Amalgamation – the retrieval of fine gold dust with mercury, used mainly during sluicing operations. Deposited behind riffle bars, the amalgam is collected afterward for separation by retorting. (PM: 120)

Anchor ice – slush formed on an already frozen layer of lake or river ice, frustrating use of sleds. Also ice still frozen or ‘anchored’ to riverbed.

Anvil City – initial name for Nome, taken from an anvil shaped rock outcrop nearby.

Anxious Seat – the seat occupied by the defendant in Dawson City’s police court. (White: 78)

Apron - canvas or carpet stretched on a wooden frame and placed in a rocker, designed to capture the fine gold flakes sifted through the hopper during clean- up.

Arbuckles – slang for coffee, from a popular brand name.

Arctic Brotherhood – secret fraternal organization of prospectors formed in Skagway in 1899, one of whose purposes being adjudication of claim disputes. Its name was taken from the snow-filled AB discernible on a mountain outside Skagway. (Jordan: 55)

Arctics – felt-lined rubber boots or overshoes. (Davis: 68)

Armstrong Sawmill – whipsawing. Also, friendship killer.

Arnica – a natural liniment used for bruises or sore muscles. (Conger: 49)

Ashcroft Trail – one of the all-Canadian overland routes to the Klondike, leading from Ashcroft B.C. along the Telegraph Creek Trail to Whitehorse, Yukon..

Assay - to test chemically the content of gold and other substances in ore, or to ascertain the fineness or purity of placer gold.

Assessment Month – a month in which assessment work on a mining claim must be done, usually July, thus assuring the claimholder’s privileges to the ground. (USGS Spurr : 128)

Athabaska Landing – Hudson’s Bay Company post on the Athabaska River about 100 miles northwest of Edmonton, starting point for the 2595-mile main water route via the Athabaska, McKenzie, Porcupine, and the Yukon Rivers. (Graham :36).

Atlin City – boom-town on the shore of Atlin Lake established during the Atlin stampede of 1898. (Garland :220)

Atlin Gold District – discovered in 1898 near Atlin Lake and consisting of Pine (the discovery creek), Birch, Willow, Boulder, and McKee creeks, whose focus was the boomtown of Discovery.

Atlin Strike – a brief gold rush on the east shore of Lake Atlin in summer, 1898, which distracted some latecomers to Skagway as well as much of the WP&YR railroad construction workers. (Downs:148)

“A ton of gold, a ton of goods” – merchant’s slogan in Seattle and elsewhere capitalizing on the need for a year’s supply of provisions required a prospectors heading for the Klondike.

-B-

Back-door Route – the all-Canadian route over the Edmonton trail. (CR: 29)

Back-tripping – the ordeal of relaying one’s supplies up the trail in increments, making trips back to the last cache for relay of another load to the next.

Back-wash – to be left in the wake of a steamboat, especially in the course of a race down the river. (Hitchcock: 418)

Badger Game – a con game in which a woman lured a financially well-off man into having an affair, during which her accomplice bursts in posing as her husband, threatening legal action. The victim of the entrapment usually paid off to avoid unwanted publicity. (Johnston: 103)

the Bar – the outlet of the Yukon River on the Bering Sea, the destination of riverboats departing from St. Michael. (Hitchcock: 58)

Bar – an alluvial deposit of sand and gravel, often ten or twenty feet or more above the low water level of the river or creek. (Adney: 236) Also the shallow portion of the river.

Bar diggings – strips of land 100 feet wide at high-water mark extending into the river at its lowest water level; its sides are parallel lines run at right angles to the stream. (PM: 46)

Barabas – Eskimo houses along the lower Yukon River built half underground, inhabited in winter. (Moore: 72)

Basket sleigh (sled) – dogsled with railing rising upward from sled front on either side, with handle bars for the driver. Used for sledding freight and occasional passengers. Loaded sled. (Tuck: 88)

British Columbia Yukon Railway Company – a corporation formed to obtain legislative charter from British Columbia in 1899 for construction of the White Pass & Yukon Route railroad through its territory.

British Yukon Navigation Company (B.Y.N.) – river division of the WP&YR railroad, formed in 1901 after purchase of the John Irving Navigation Co.—serving the Atlin-Bennett Lake region—and the Canadian Development Co., a winter stage line between Whitehorse and Dawson City. This netted the WP&YR a transportation monopoly from Skagway to the Klondike.

British Yukon Railway Company – a corporation formed in spring 1898 to obtain a charter for construction of the White Pass & Yukon Route railroad through its territory of the Yukon.

Buck, buck over – carry one’s supplies, especially in fording a stream. (Garland: 83)

Buck the ice – the dangerous journey of following the ice in a boat during break-up on the Yukon River. (Stanley: 47)

Buck the tiger – to try one’s luck gambling, particularly with large stakes. (Jordan: 189)

Buckle to it – hard work, “get down to business.” (Garland: 178)

Building bee – neighbors assisting in erecting another’s cabin or building. (Hitchcock: 258)

Bummer – a worthless person; a non-productive person. (Jordan: 73)

Bunco – the trade of confidence or shell-game men; anything phony or deceptive.

Bullion – the gold melted into bars, ingots, or plates for shipment and safekeeping.

Bum – poor, badly or worn out. “I’m feeling bum.” (Tuck: 62)

Bureau of Information – advertising committee spearheaded by Erastus Brainerd and supported by the Seattle Chamber of Commerce to promote Seattle at the time of the gold rush.

Burg – Dawson City. (Tuck: 53)

Burning – thawing frozen ground by fire to enable excavation of a shaft or drift. Done in winter, green wood was used to produce a sustained, smoldering heat. (CR: 18)

Burns Whim – the cable whim installed by Arthur Burns over the summit of Chilkoot Pass in 1897-98.

Bust, busted – financially broke, also a boom town or district that failed.

Beach rats – the goldseekers who worked the beach placers at Nome. (Jordan: 45)

Beanpot – pot for cooking beans; carried along in winter, the cooked beans froze and thus kept for reheating at the next meal. (Chase: 52)

Bedrock – the hard rock or clay-packed underground surface on which placer gold eventually lodged. In the Klondike this varied from ten to forty feet or more below the surface of the ground.

Belly-wash – coffee. (Chase: 49)

Bench diggings (claims) – 100-foot square claims staked on benches above streams. In the Klondike it was initially permitted to stake one creek and one bench claim, but not more than one of each excepting one additional by right of discovery. See: Discovery claim.

Bennet, Bennett City – Settlement on Lake Bennett, 32 miles above Dyea on the Chilkoot Trail, where stampedeers constructed boats for the Yukon River journey to the Klondike.

Big jaw – scurvy; in reference to the swelling of the gums characteristic of the disease. (Conger: 51)

Big Rush – in after years, the term differentiating the Klondike from other gold rushes of the far North.

Big shots – the moneyed or powerful; also contemptuously as “know it all.” (Tuck: 45)

Bitch – improvised illumination; originally a piece of fat wedged into a stick and lit; later, a rag twisted into a can of fat and lit as a lamp. (Adney: 201)

Black leg, black leg rheumatism – scurvy; reference to the stage of the disease producing skin discoloration and aching joints, frequently mistaken for rheumatism. (Conger: 51)

Black sand – magnetite, particles of iron frequently associated—due to its high specific gravity—with placer gold.

Blank – a failed prospect; any enterprise that netted disappointing results.

Blanket sail – a sail improvised from poles and a blanket to propel loaded sleds over snow and ice.

Blaze – in poker, a hand of any five picture cards; considered eccentric, in some gambling houses it beat two pairs but lost to three of a kind. (Jordan: 190)

Bloody flux – dysentery, sometimes brought on by drinking water from streams where mining was underway. (Tuck: 62)

Blow-downs – fallen trees along a riverbank.

Blower – a brass dish into which gold dust was poured from the poke for transfer to the weighing dish in a set of scales, the extra dust then transferred from the blower to the poke. See hitting the blower. (Johnston: 93)

Blow in – spend lavishly. (Hitchcock: 130)

Blow (oneself) – to spend extravagantly, particularly on food, liquor, or entertainment. (White: 32)

Bonanza King – a wealthy claim owner on Bonanza Creek; any of the wealthy claim owners in the Klondike.

Bonanza's pup – reference to Eldorado Creek by the first men to stake along Bonanza—a.k.a. Rabbit Creek—in 1896. (Berton: 55)

Bone yard – cemetery.

Bone-cup – containers made of bone ash used for assaying.

Boom – sudden success; the flourishing of a local economy following a gold strike.

Boomed – description of any product or service whose ordinary cost suddenly soared as a result of unexpected demand. (CR: 196)

Booming – large scale ground sluicing using an intermittent water supply, i.e. a dam with an automatic gate, opening when reservoir is filled, thereby washing away boulders and dirt. (PM: 66)

Booster – an employee of a gambling house who oversaw and encouraged participation in the games of chance. (Walden: 126)

Boss cook – head cook of a mining or other party, boss meaning top-notch or best. (Tuck: 21)

Bottom; bottom in pay – to locate or strike paydirt in the bottom of a mine shaft. (Rickard: 212)

Box – sluice box.

Box-length – an area of ground roughly 156 square feet, measured by the length of a sluice box (12 feet long by six feet to either side) being as far as a man could reach with a long-handled shovel. “The term is used in speaking of the amount of gold cleaned up from that extent of ground.” (Adney: 234)

Brackett’s Road – George Brackett’s unfinished attempt to build a wagon road to the summit of White Pass. It terminated roughly 12 miles beyond Skagway; Brackett sold his right of way to the White Pass & Yukon Route railroad in 1898.

Break trail – to clear a trail with snowshoes, usually in advance of a dogsled.

-C-

Cabin fever – the restlessness caused by spending a long winter alone or with others in close confinement.

Cabin with – to share a cabin or living quarters. (Tuck: 93)

Cache – a store of goods set off the trail during the transport of back-tripping of ones outfit; to store such supplies off-trail; a platform storage bin raised above ground as protection of camp stores from predators.

California pump – a crank-operated canvas conveyor belt to which wooden blocks were nailed, used to catch and raise water from a source below to a sluicing reservoir above. (CR: 117)

Camp Dyea – U.S. Army camp established in 1898 at Dyea to maintain order and federal presence on the boundary; replaced by Camp Skagway following a fire that destroyed the first camp.

Camp robber – a scavenging bird that took food left open in camp or cache.

Camp Skagway – U.S. Army camp established at site of present-day Mary Walsh Park in Skagway in 1899, after destruction of Camp Dyea by a fire. The new camp remained in Skagway until the completion of Fort William Seward in Haines in 1903.

Canayens – French-Canadians. (Lynch: 5)

Canyon City – a boom-town 7 ½ miles from Dyea on the Chilkoot Trail, and the farthest point for wagon traffic.

Cappers – accomplices in games of chance—particularly in rigged or shell games—who lure the unsuspecting by posing as lucky gamblers. (Davis: 43)

Caribou – a rich placer district discovered in British Columbia in 1871, south of the headwaters of the Lewes River. One of a series of gold rushes leading to the northwesterly advancement of the mining frontier.

Caribou Crossing – originally a major trading site between interior and coastal Indians, and a migration corridor for vast herds of caribou, the site became a station on the WP&YR and was condensed to Carcross.

Cash in – die.

Cashier's ague – the “illness” that caused cashiers to carelessly spill their customers' gold dust during weighing in Dawson City establishments, resulting in the cashier's slow accumulation of his own “pile” over the course of business.

Cassiar – following discovery of the Caribou in 1871, another placer district was located in the Cassiar Mountains. With its exhaustion, miners prospected along the Stikeen River to its mouth, thence northward—resulting in the discovery of the Silver Bow Basin and the establishment of Juneau in 1880.

Cayuse – horse. (Berton: 112)

[]-cent dirt – see []-cent pan.

[]-cent pan – the amount of gold recovered in a pan of gravel. In the 1890s an eight-cent pan was considered wages, a five-cent pan poor wages worked as a last resort; ten-cent pans or better were considered good and the ground worthy of mining development. The value of the ground was estimated at the ration of 130 pans of gravel per cubic yard.

Chaff – tease. (Hitchcock: 235)

Chalmers Trail – the roughest section of the all-Canadian overland trail from Edmonton to Peace River Crossing, a segment numbering 320 miles, and particularly the 120-mile stretch from Fort Assinboine to Lesser Slave Lake.

Charles H. Hamilton – the third steamboat of the NAT&T Co., built in summer 1897, and larger than its predecessors Portus B. Weare and John J. Healy. (Burlingame: 315)

Charley Indians – miners' nickname for the Indians who lived at Circle City prior to the Klondike discovery, after their chief “Charley.” (Spurr: 4/26)

Cheechako money – paper money. The long-awaited arrival of banks in Dawson City signaled mass exchanges of cumbersome gold pokes for currency.

Cheechako potatoes – fresh potatoes, as opposed to the evaporated variety. So called because they were “new to the country” to the people of Dawson City, who after the winter were starved for fresh vegetables.

Cheese – money. (Lynch: 41)

Chew the rag – talk, chew the fat.

Chicharko – cheechako. (Spurr: 2/34)

Chilkoot lockstep – the manner in which the Golden Stairs up Chilkoot Pass were ascended in the winter of 1897-1898.

Chilkoot Railroad & Transportation Company – one of the leading tramway operators over Chilkoot Pass, whose hopes for a railroad were dashed by construction of the WP&YR, which bought out the tramway companies.

China wheel – an endless belt with buckets attached turning over two wheels, worked by hand or by water pressure to retrieve water that escaped the flumes and deposited in the cut below during the clean-up. (Adney: 405)

Chin-music – talk, particularly grouching or complaining; idle talk. (Graham: 139)

Chinook – an unseasonable, warm southerly wind. (Davis: 112)

Chip in – contribute. (CR: 86)

Cities of Destruction – the lawless towns of Skagway and Dyea, Alaska. (Davis: 67)

Claim – plots of land of authorized dimension registered for mining purposes, and divided into bench, bar, and creek claims by geography. Claim-holders were accorded rights and responsibilities that to 1899 were defined in Alaska through the miner’s meeting. In Canada, claims were registered and adjudicated by the district gold commissioner.

Claim-jumping – legally, the occupation and recording of a staked but unrecorded lapsed claim; illegally, the occupation and exploitation of a claim legally staked and registered by someone else.

Clean-up, spring clean-up – the sluicing of dumps of paydirt excavated the previous winter. Performed in springtime to take advantage of the available water supply.

Clean-up man – a man following a string of packhorses, especially on the White Pass Trail. Usually brandishing a club, his job was to encourage tired or straggling horses. (Burnham: 47)

Clip – to take advantage of, particularly in games of chance. “If any sucker begged to be clipped, we did it.” (Jordan: 41)

Clondyke – initial newspaper spelling of Klondike.

Close Brothers – the London syndicate that financed construction of the White Pass & Yukon Route railroad.

Close season – the period during which placer mining was suspended, fixed by the gold commissioner in whose district the claims were located. (PM: 46)

Cold deck – a new deck of playing cards.

Coarse gold – gold particles double the size of a pinhead or bigger. (McMichael: 48)

Coffin ship – an old, decrepit, or poorly-built vessel barely safe or serviceable, and yet pressed into service to meet transportation demands. (Lee: 54)

Colors – traces or specks of gold remaining in the pan after panning.

Come to the scratch – to be “johnny on the spot” for a meal, event, etc. (Roehr: 14)

Commercial dust – trade gold, used in everyday exchange. As it was typically laced with black sand (and sometimes with brass or iron filings) it was usually discounted in Dawson City to \$16 an ounce.

Consumption – tuberculosis.

Cooper & Levy – one of many Seattle grocery businesses active during the rush, this was operated by Isaac Cooper and Louis Levy on 104-106 1st Avenue, and was active in the Alaska trade from the 1890s to the 1900s.

Copper City – Valdez. (Conger: 42)

Copper River route – the grueling, so-called all-American route to the interior over Valdez Glacier and up the Copper River, used by relatively few stampeders.

Corbett & Fitzsimmons – euphemism for the woodpile at the Canadian mounted police compound in Dawson City, where offenders were sentenced to cut wood to earn their keep for the duration of their confinement. (Wiedemann: 198) Named for the famous prizefighters of the day.

Cord – unit of measure familiar to lumbermen, miners, steamboatmen and wood contractors, equivalent to 128 cubic feet in a stack measuring 4 by 4 by 8 feet.

Courduroy – the improvement of a muddy or water-soaked road by laying poles side by side at right angles atop it.

Corner – to acquire a monopoly on a certain commodity, raising demand and cornering profits. (Hitchcock: 377)

Corner stakes – wooden stakes marking the corner boundaries of bench and creek claims. The stakes had to be squared at the top, numbered and marked according to the regulations of the district, and a clear path blazed from stake to stake—procedures that tended to be haphazard at best in the height of the stampede.

Coronet – a rightly-rolled strip of gold and silver produced in the assay process.

Corralled – to corner an item and thereby drive up its price, especially in a food commodity. (Davis: 143)

Coward's martingale – professional gambling term for amateur attempt to beat the odds at roulette through progression. Here a player would bet \$10 and if he lost, would add \$1 to his next bet; if he won, he'd subtract \$1—hence if he won five and lost five he broke even. The odds were still poor, for if he won ten straight bets he gained \$55, but if he lost ten straight, he threw away \$145. (Jordan: 193)

Cracker-jack –excellent, top-notch, especially in describing an individual's skills. "Cracker-jack camp cook." (Tuck: 47)

Crater Lake – a bowl-shaped lake located 17 mile from Dyea and just beyond the summit of Chilkoot Pass on the Chilkoot Trail.

Creek claim – gold claim staked along a creek, in the Klondike dimensions being initially 500 feet along the creek valley and as wide as the valley from rimrock to rimrock. Claims were numbered and recorded consecutively from the discovery claim: one, two, etc. above or below (upstream or downstream of) discovery.

Creeper – louse. (White: 51)

Creepers, ice creepers – crampons, the bottom of which provided traction on ice, shaped and strapped to the sole of the boot.

Creole – slang for a person of Russian-Indian descent in Alaska.

Crib – a small shack used for living and prostitution purposes, frequently clustered along a boardwalk constituting the red-light district.

Cribbing – a structure of notched logs built log-cabin fashion and surmounted by a rope winch for raising paydirt. The cribbing was usually built before excavation began, and kept the growing dumps of paydirt from seeping back into the shaft.

Crips – cripples—the sick or those unable to work due to accident or illness (jocularly meant.) (Grinnell: 12)

Cross-cut – the sinking of a shaft and drifting along the bedrock beneath and at right angles to the valley in hope of locating the paystreak. (Adney: 245)

Crown Fuel Reduction Plant –the NWMP woodpile in its Dawson City yard, where offenders were consigned to work out their sentence sawing wood. (White: 67)

Cub days – the early days of an event or community, or individual. (Davis: 36)

Cudahy – Chicago meat-packing firm of John and Michael Cudahy, major stockholders in the North American Transportation and Trading Co. (Berton: 26)

Cupel – shallow fireproof dish made of bone-ash for use in assaying.

Current sail – a piece of canvas attached to the stern of a boat and weighted with rocks to take advantage of river currents.

Cut – the excavation along a streambed in which sluicing takes place (ground sluicing); the area cut away for placement of sluice boxes. (Adney: 235)

Cut, cut-down – the practice of saloon owners of diluting whiskey and other liquors to maximize profits. (Jordan: 35)

Cut no figure – make any difference, “cuts no ice.” (Hitchcock: 261)

Cut up – emotional collapse or breakdown.

-D-

Dalton Post – way station on the Dalton Trail between Pyramid Harbor on Lynn Canal and Fort Selkirk on the Yukon River, established by Jack Dalton in 1898.

Dalton Trail – a toll road pioneered by an American, Jack Dalton, from Pyramid Harbor on Lynn Canal to Fort Selkirk on the Yukon River in 1898, primarily for the movement of livestock to the interior.

“Damn the gold! You can’t eat it.” – sentiment expressed in Dawson City during the food shortages of the winter of 1896-1897, which caused great hardships for even the wealthiest miners. (Davis: 142)

Dance check – a token given by the bartenders to the establishment’s dance hall girls, entitling them to a percentage of the price of every drink served their male customers. Dances were consequently brief as the men were repeatedly steered to the bar for another drink. (Chase: 74)

Dawson Annex – the official name of the community that sprang up on the opposite bank of the Yukon across from Dawson City, and known by its residents as West Dawson. (Hitchcock: 345)

Dawson City – townsite laid out by Joe LaDue and Arthur Harper as the confluence of the Yukon and Klondike rivers in 1896, and named for Canadian geologist George Dawson.

Dead-game sports – the upper crust of Dawson City society that spent ample time and money in the dance halls—dead game for any energetic dance hall girl or gambler. (Bronson: 117)

Dead Horse Trail – the White Pass Trail from Skagway to Bennett, on which over 3000 pack animals perished during the height of the rush.

Dead wood – lazy indolent person(s). (Tuck: 98)

Dead work – “work for which there is no immediate return, such as sinking shafts to bedrock...building cabins, sluice boxes, furniture, etc.; and in building dams across the stream in order to raise the water into the sluice boxes.” (Stanley: 100)

Deep mining – underground mining.

Delicacies – non-bulk items in an outfit not essential to the diet, but included to vary and improve it: sugar, butter, canned milk, dried fruits, condiments. (Davis: 57)

Desecrated vegetables – nickname for the sometimes less than palatable desiccated vegetables.

Desiccated vegetables – a process in use since the 1870s of drying and pressing vegetables for reconstitution in soup.

Devil's Cauldron – the stormy, windswept bowl just at the summit of Chilkoot Pass.

Devil's Club – a sharp-thorned shrub found in southeast Alaska, whose prongs easily penetrated clothing and skin, causing an irritating rash.

Devil's Elbow – the sharp, treacherous turn in the rapid-filled river connecting Lakes Lindeman and Bennett. (Tuck: 28)

Devil's Hill – the first of a series of steep hills to be negotiated on the White Pass Trail. (Berton: 153)

Diamond hitch – an adjustable, diamond-shaped rope hitch for tying loads onto pack saddles or backboards.

Diggings – placer mining areas. (PM: 46)

Dip – the slant of the bedrock showing the direction of the ancient stream, toward which the miner drifted. (Adney: 244)

Dirt – paydirt. (Rickard: 228)

Discovery claim – the first creek claim located in a new area or district and the point of reference from which subsequent claims were numbered. The discoverer had the right to stake a second claim adjacent to the discovery claim, which was then numbered either 1 above (upstream of) or below (downstream of) the discovery.

District – a legally defined placer mining area; in the Klondike this comprised the Klondike River and all its tributaries. Canadian law changed at the time of the stampede following the Klondike discovery, limiting miners to one claim per district as opposed to one per creek, as previously. (Adney: 301)

Ditch – a trench excavated for the supplying of water over long distances, preferable in expense to building a flume. (PM: 82)

Do everybody else – observation of a Nome participant of everyone busy trying to do (take advantage of) everybody else. (Time-Life: 145)

Do the town – look around, take in the town. (Hitchcock: 104)

Do unto others as you would be done by – motto of the Miner's Association, later the Yukon Order of Pioneers. The golden rule applied in particular to mutual assistance in need and the sharing of news of recent gold discoveries—an attitude all but swept away by the mass arrivals of newcomers to the country in 1897-1899. (Berton: 33)

Dog-corral – a log enclosure used to put the loaded sleds in on the freighter’s arrival, the dogs being kept outside and away from the provisions packed on the sleds. (Spurr: 6/30)

Dog-puncher – professional sled-dog driver/freighter.

Dog moccasins – leather moccasins tied to sled-dogs’ feet as protection on sharp snow and icefields.

Dome – the large, scarred mountain looming over Dawson City, the major landmark of the Klondike district.

Done in the eye – taken advantage of, especially financially; “shafted.” (Hitchcock: 355)

Done up – exhausted to the point of physical collapse. (Conger: 195)

Double up – to make two trips over the same route to advance an outfit; backtrip. (Grinnell: 53)

Double rough-lock – the winding or rope around both runners of a Yukon sled to help in controlling it on steep descents.

Doubling up – a professional gambler’s term for an amateur’s attempt to eat the odds in roulette by doubling one’s bet at every play, thus eventually recovering one’s losses. “If you double up five times in a row and finally win you get a return of sixteen to one. Yet the odds against you are thirty-one to one. You cannot beat the odds.” (Jordan: 192)

Dough gods – a mixture of bacon grease and dough biscuits warmed in a skillet until the grease is absorbed, then baked. The heavy biscuits carried one easily between meals. (Burnham: 104)

Down below – U.S. territory outside of Alaska. (White: 22)

Doxy – a higher-class prostitute. “She was no two-bit whore; she was a two-dollar doxy.” (Jordan: 21)

Draw a blank –fail or come up empty-handed at some endeavor. (Chase: 64)

Dredge – a self-contained, mechanized sluicing operation. The dredge floated in a pool of water, working its way up the valley by scraping, sluicing, and depositing dross. Dredging in the Klondike began after the Klondike boom until 1966 on a large scale, and has since seen a small resurgence.

Dredging permit – five-mile parcels of land could be leased to mining companies by the Canadian government once this permit was applied and paid for—usually for a hefty fee.

Drift – a tunnel excavated below a vertical shaft along bedrock to locate and remove paydirt, the frozen ground first thawed in winter by fire and later by steam-points. When a drift reached fifteen to twenty feet, which was as far as it was profitable to drag the dirt, another shaft was sunk to meet and continue it. (Adney: 244)

Drift face – the back wall or surface of a drift where burning and excavation were centered.

Drifting – tunneling above bedrock using hand labor. (Rickard: 215)

Drift mining – winter work, i.e. thawing and excavating shafts and drifts into the frozen ground in search of the paystreak, the frozen ground obviating the need for timbers. (Adney: 251)

Drop – to spend, especially to throw away in gambling. “A young boy who had sold a rich claim ‘dropped’ \$18,000 in the course of thirty-six hours’ play.” (Adney: 345)

Dry camp – a campsite where drinking water is not available.

Dry diggings – placer mines over which a river never extends. (PM: 46)

Duffer – a slow-witted man. (Jordan: 203)

Dump – paydirt excavated from the mine and dumped in a separate pile from that of the dross.

Dump-box – a sluice-box two feet wide at the top, tapering to one foot below, and 12 feet long or less, lined with riffles and placed below a string of sluices. This was occasionally followed by two or three riffled tail boxes—all to better ensure efficient gold retrieval.

Dunnage bags – baggage; personal effects. (McMichael: 40)

Dutchman – German. (Jordan: 58)

Dutch socks – German socks; thick, wool boot socks. (CR: 276)

Dyea – boom-town at the foot of the Chilkoot trail, reached from Skagway by shallow-draft vessels, so named from the corruption of the word Taiya, the river at whose mouth Dyea was established.

Dyea Trail – Chilkoot Trail.

-E-

Eat a square – to have a (square) meal. (Tuck: 63)

Edmonton Overland Trail – the grueling 1446-mile route to the Klondike from Edmonton via Fort Assinboine, Peace River Crossing, Fort St. John, Watson Lake, and the Pelly River to Fort Selkirk and the Yukon.

Eldorado Kings – any of the wealthy claim-owners on Eldorado Creek; generically any wealthy Klondike miner.

The Eye – the middle of Miles Canyon where the walls of the chute widen into a circular bowl, the water there swirling counterclockwise in a great whirlpool. (Burnham: 58)

-F-

Face – the drift face or underground surface of the paystreak being burned and excavated. (Ironmonger-Sola: 79)

Fagged out – “all in,” physically exhausted. (Tuck: 99)

Fake – phony, humbug, not as billed or expected. (Tuck: 93)

Fakers – con men. (Heller: 130)

Faro – long-popular gambling game in which the cards already played are displayed on the dealer’s board. Faro was not as big a winner for the house as roulette, or as popular as poker.

Father of the Yukon – nickname of the Alaska-Yukon pioneer Leroy N. “Jack” McQuesten, who entered the country about 1871 in the employ of the Alaska Commercial Company as a trader along the Yukon River.

Feed the fishes – vomiting overboard from seasickness. (Tuck: 75)

Figure – to estimate or ‘peg’ a person or thing. “I figured him for an Army deserter.” (Jordan: 89)

Finnegan’s Point – a “huddle of tents surrounding a hard core of blacksmith shop, saloon, and a restaurant” five miles from Dyea on the Chilkoot Trail. Named for Pat Finnegan, who operated a short-lived toll-bridge. (Berton: 247)

Fins – hands. (Hitchcock: 230)

Fire-thawing – the means of thawing the frozen ground by setting fires preparatory to excavation of a shaft or drift. Burning.

Firing – fire-thawing (CR: 94); also retorting. (CR: 16)

First rush – the initial stampede from Forty Mile, Circle City, and other mining camps to the Klondike following word of its discovery in summer, 1896. (Stanley: 196)

First rush – the initial stampede in 1897, when Dyea and Skagway were undeveloped, as opposed to the later winter stampede of 1897-1898. (Davis: 47)

Fizz – champagne. (Hitchcock: 130)

The Flagpole – the summit of the steep divide separating the head of Bonanza Creek with Sulphur Creek. (Wiedemann: 187)

Flippers – hands. (Spurr: 2/33)

Float – loose rocks on the sides of hills, thought to be an indicator of an underground lode. (CR: 99)

Floater – the corpse of a drowning victim. (Roehr: 52)

Float rock – see float.

Flop – sleep. (Chase: 130)

Flour gold – gold dust as fine as flour. (Tuck: 96)

Flume – rectangular wooden troughs for funneling water to placer sites, built as a last resort due to the expense of construction and maintenance.

Flush – financially well-off. (White: 136)

Fly – a piece of canvas about twelve feet square used as shelter in place of a tent. (Moore: 81)

Fool hens – ptarmigan. (Davis: 71)

Fool's gold – iron pyrite, distinguished from gold by its glittery hue and brittleness.

The Forks – nickname of the community of Grand Forks. (Hitchcock: 160)

Fort Constantine – NWMP post established in 1894 near Fort Cudahy at Fortymile, after N.A.T.&T. was forced to sell goods at ACC prices by miners decree. Healy's complaint to Ottawa resulted in a police presence and the end of miners law. (Burlingame: 314)

Fort Cudahy – first Yukon trading post of the N.A.T.&T. established in summer, 1893 across from the A.C.Co. post at Fortymile, by John J. Healy. Named for the Cudahy investors in the new trading company. (Burlingame: 314)

Fort Get-There – station of the newly-formed N.A.T. &T. establishment at St. Michael Island in April, 1892 by John J. Healy. Site later renamed "Healy." (Burlingame: 313)

Fort Reliance – Leroy "Jack" McQuesten's first assignment for the Alaska Commercial Co., establishing a trading post in 1874 six mile upstream of the later site of Dawson. (Davis: 138)

Fort Selkirk – trading post established in 1848 by Robert Campbell of the Hudson's Bay Co., at the junction of the Pelly and Lewes Rivers. (Downs: 137)

Fort Yukon – trading post established in 847 by A.S. Murray of the Hudson's Bay Co., at the junction of the Porcupine and Yukon Rivers. (Downs: 137)

Fortymile – mining camp established in 1886 following Arthur Harper's discovery of gold in the vicinity. Located at the confluence of the Yukon and Fortymile rivers about 40 miles from Fort Reliance, Fortymile was first to receive news of the discovery at Bonanza Creek in 1896.

Found – paid for, inclusive. (Ironmonger-Sola: 97)

Fraction – the overage resulting from a mismeasured claim. Claims that after surveying produced fractions were in turn thrown open to staking. The richest Klondike fraction turned out to be the 86-foot-wide, pie-shaped Dick Lowe fraction at the junction of Bonanza, Eldorado, and Big Skookum Gulch. (Berton: 78)

Free gold – placer gold; gold that is free, or separate from ore.

Free miner's certificate – a license required by 1898, assessed by Canadian authorities for the right of individual miners to prospect. One of many new taxes at which both American and Canadian prospectors chafed. (Adney: 436)

Freeze-out game – a game or situation where opponents progressively raise the ante—or increase the opposition—to finish the other off and win. (White: 148)

Freeze-up – the time of year when the Yukon freezes, and all river transport go into winter quarters.

Friendship killer – the whipsawing of planks from logs for boat-building, in particular, requiring two men to work together. The exacting labor broke many a friendship.

Frost – frozen ground. (Rickard: 218) See geologic frost and seasonal frost.

Frozen out –unable to meet the bet in a poker game, and being forced to pull out with a good hand. (Jordan: 200) Any proposition from which one must withdraw due to bad luck.

Frying-pan bread –dough placed in a fry pan and cooked, the pan then removed and tilted toward fire. Resulted in a heavy bread. (Ironmonger-Sola: 72)

Fuel factory – the notorious NWMP woodpile at Dawson, where lawbreakers were condemned to saw wood ten hours per day regardless of weather for the duration of their sentence. (Lynch: 305)

Fuzz – the technique of a card cheat who pretends to shuffle the deck, but instead takes cards off the top and bottom of the deck. (Jordan: 188)

-G-

Galley – the kitchen onboard a ship or steamboat.

G.B., the G.B. – to be released or fired from a responsibility. “The new cook is nothing extra and unless he improves he is liable to get the ‘G.B.’ (Tuck: 53) Perhaps from ‘good-bye.’

Gee-pole – a wooden pole run through an iron ring affixed to the front side of a Yukon sled, used for steering and braking.

Geologic frost – permanently frozen ground, “the sequel of a glacial period.” (Rickard: 222)

Germans – thick woolen boot socks called ‘German socks.’ (Welles: 220)

Germea – a hot cereal made from grain from a popular brand of the same name.

Get up – prepare. “We usually get up very good meals.” (Grinnell: 11)

“Getting a divorce” – the splitting up of a partnership and division of common property due to the rigors of the trail or personality clashes.

Gink – guy, man. (White: 41)

Give the go-by – to abandon someone or something. (Hitchcock: 374)

Give the once-over – visit or examine a place or thing. (Tuck: 91)

Glaciers – the ice which formed in tens or new cabins of unseasoned logs during winter, caused by condensation from cooking freezing to walls and ceiling.

Glenora – boom-town on the Stikeen River, supply point for stampeders on the Stikeen and Ashcroft routes to the Klondike.

Glim – candle. “Douse the glims!” (Hitchcock: 236)

Go (a bit) large – to loosen up and enjoy a night on the town; to go on a binge. (Bronson: 176)

Going in – to be heading for the interior and Dawson. (McMichael: 20)

Go in the same groove – to follow the same routine. (Tuck: 51)

Go in shucks – go halves, fifty-fifty, in a partnership. (Lynch: 194)

Go on a tear – go on a spree; get drunk.

Go out, go outside – to leave the north and return to the States. (Tuck: 93)

God’s country – U.S. territory—especially Alaska, where prospectors could work with a minimum of government regulation.

Gold – soft, yellow, corrosion-resistant, the most malleable and ductile metal with a specific gravity of 19, occurring in veins and alluvial deposits. The standard upon which the world’s advanced national economies were based in the late nineteenth century.

Gold belt – gold-bearing region. (Garland: 102)

Gold certificate – a monetary note formerly issued to the public by the U.S. Treasury, and redeemable in gold.

Gold commissioner – the government representative and leading administrative and judicial official in a Canadian mining district. The first two gold commissioners in the Klondike were Thomas Fawcett and Major J.M. Walsh (of the North West Mounted Police), whose brief tenures were fraught with controversy and led to the appointment in turn of William Ogilvie.

Gold-digger – a woman who goes north in search of a wealthy miner, the attachment being more of a financial rather than matrimonial intent. (Chase: 123)

“Gold is where you find it” – time-worn slogan of gold miners, meaning there are no set geological rules by which gold may be easily discovered.

Gold reserve – the reserve of gold bullion held by a government or central bank to redeem its notes.

Gold standard – a monetary standard under which the basic unit of currency is equal in value to and exchangeable for a specified amount of gold. The U.S. had a gold-based economy roughly

from the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, being rescinded in the 1930s under the Roosevelt administration.

Golden River – the Klondike River. (Garland: 4)

Golden Stairs – the 1500 or so steps carved and worn into the ice up Chilkoot Pass in the winter of 1897-1898.

Gone to pieces – fall apart, separate. “His party has gone to pieces.” (Tuck: 52)

Goonies – black-footed albatross; sailor slang. (Grinnell: 12)

Grand Forks – the town that sprang up at the juncture of Bonanza and Eldorado creeks. Also called “the Forks.”

Granite ware – enameled cooking ware, often swirled in design.

Gravel heaver – shoveller. (Grinnell: 76)

The Graveyard – nickname for White Horse Rapids, due to the loss of boats and lives that occurred there. (Shand: 101)

Grasshopper – the use of spars and winch to lift and drag a shallow draft steamboat over a river baron which it has grounded, producing a grasshopper-like appearance.

Graybacks – body lice. (Tuck: 48)

Grease Trail – Chilkoot trail name used by Coastal Indians, “for across it they had traded the precious oolakan fish-oil, which was one of their staples of barter with the tribes of the Interior.” (Davis: 46)

Greek – a professional card cheat, pronounced “Greck.” (Jordan: 188) Also called hustler, philosopher.

Greener, greeny – a tenderfoot or cheechako. (Tuck: 75)

Grizzly – a perforated sheet or iron at the bottom of a rocker hopper, through which pebbles and gold-laden gravel were sifted in rocking.

Ground sluicing – treating gold-bearing gravel by washing it in trenches cut into bedrock, the trenches lined with rocks to serve as riffles. Especially suited where water is not in sufficient supply for the use of sluice boxes. (PM: 65; Adney: 404)

Growl – complain. (Tuck: 93)

Grub – food.

Grubstake – the loan of money or goods to form a mining outfit, obtained from friends or associates on credit or for a share in a successful strike.

Grubstake claim, grubstake strike – a small gold strike or find sufficient only to cover expenses, or finance the next outfit. (CR: 146)

Grub Stake River – the Stewart River, where the miner returns after a season of unsuccessful prospecting elsewhere, as a steady source of gold for replenishing the outfit. (Stanley: 57)

Gull – to bluff or make a fool of someone. (Jordan: 99)

Gum boots – waterproof rubber boots.

Gumboot miner – the average independent prospector or free miner. (Adney: 436)

-H-

Happy Camp – a popular camping spot 21 miles above Dyea on the Chilkoot Trail, and four miles distant from Lake Lindeman.

Harper House – Arthur Harper’s trading post at Fort Selkirk. (Stanley: 56)

Hard case – a tough character. (Ogilvie: 181)

Have a case – have a strong attraction or crush on a member of the opposite sex. (Chase: 170)

Have a smile – have a drink. (Jordan: 90)

Hazelton – a Hudson Bay Company post on the Skeena River in British Columbia, and a supply point on the Ashcroft Trail.

Healy’s Post – the trading post of John J. Healy and his partner in Dyea, also called Healy & Wilson. (Spurr: 2/32)

Hell’s Gate – a stretch of bad water below Rink Rapids on the Yukon River later improved for navigation by the government. (Shand: 106)

Hen fruit – eggs. (Davis: 143)

High grade ground – rich gold-bearing ground, or a lucrative claim.

High grading – to steal gold while employed to work someone’s claim.

High man, low man – the two positions of whipsawing, low man pulling down the saw ripping the plank and getting sawdust in his eyes, high man lifting and realigning the saw following each downward stroke. Men tended to change positions frequently while cutting boards from logs.

Hired money – common mining business transaction based on promise to pay, on notes secured by liens on the dumps. (Davis: 143)

Hit it – to strike it, stake out a rich or highly promising claim. (CR: 152)

Hit the back trail – return down the trail, give up. (Garland: 90)

Hit the blower – pay a bill in gold dust. See blower. (Adney: 343)

Hog-back – mountain ridge.

Hog-chains – iron braces tightened by a turnbuckle and connected from bow and stern to the hogposts and kingpost. The braces prevented the hull of the steamboat from sagging. (Davis: 14)

Hogpost – upright posts stubbed into keelsons at either side of a steamboat's kingpost, connected by hog-chains to the bow and stern of the vessel to prevent the hull from sagging.

Hog-rods – see hog-chains.

Hoist – drink. “Have a hoist”—have a drink. (White: 17)

Home-stake – the profit on a gold claim sufficient to return home and buy a farm or house with. (Chase: 123)

Hootch – alcohol produced by fermenting molasses, sugar and flour (or other ingredients) and then heating in a still. (Jordan: 88) Also spelled hooch; possibly from the Hoochenoo Indians of Alaska, who reputedly distilled their own alcohol after territorial prohibition was better enforced.

Hoosegow – jail. (Jordan: 156)

Hopper – the removable top frame and grizzly of a rocker, into which gold-laden gravel was shoveled for separation.

Horn spoon – cut and scraped ox horn eight to ten inches long by three wide at its widest point, used for panning gold from black sand. Also made of metal. (CR: 107)

Hot, get hot – angry. (Hitchcock: 336)

Housewife – sewing kit. (Garland: 165)

Human potatoes – Klondike term for real potatoes, as opposed to the evaporated kind. (Hitchcock: 174)

Hurricane – the cabin deck above the main deck where passenger cabins were located. Also called saloon, promenade. (Downs: 14)

Hustler – a professional card sharp who relied on cheating. (Jordan: 88)

Hydraulicking – the washing down of a gold-bearing hillside by means of high-pressure water hoses for sluicing or dredging.

-I-

Icicle feet – cold feet, especially those that sold their outfits on arrival in Skagway and went home. (Berton KQ: 26)

If it goes down it is the greatest thing on earth – half-skeptical remark on the Klondike’s potential heard repeatedly in its early stage of discovery and development. (CR: 146)

Indications – sites of potential claims where colors have been found. (Grinnell: 50)

In the flux – in a state of flux or change. “Everything is in the flux, men drifting about looking for a place where they may be able to make a stake.” (Tuck: 98)

In the manner of the country – steamboat passage without accommodations, i.e. one slept in one’s blankets wherever room could be found. (Downs: 147)

In the sulks angry, sulking. (McMichael: 42)

[]-inch grade – the slant or angle of a sluice, varying from eight to eighteen inches for every running foot of trough. The shorter the sluice, the less the grade. See also lead boxes.

Inland Passage – the inside passage from Puget Sound to southeast Alaska along the sheltered coastline of Canada.

Inside – in Alaska or the Yukon.

Inside dogs – native sled dogs bred in Alaska or the Yukon, as opposed to outside dogs. (Walden: 216)

The Irish Prince – nickname of Michael Heney, who supervised construction of the WP&YR.

-J-

Jack Smith – any person who abstains from alcohol in public but drinks in secret. (Jordan: 64)

Jag – a drinking spree.

Jangle – an uproar, disagreement, or fight. “Jangle in camp.” (Conger: 41)

Jawbone – credit, derived from talking someone into buying something from them, and paying later. (White: 17)

Job, jobbed – deceive, trick. (White: 40)

John Bull’s territory – Canada.

John J. Healy – the second steamboat built by the N.A.T.&T. in 1896, named for a company founder and general manager. Comparable in size to the Portus B. Weare.

Johnnie Bull – England; Canadian territory.

Join the push – join in, follow the crowd. (Tuck: 40)

Jollification – a drinking party, jag, spree.

Jonah – a bad investment. (McKeown: 36)

Josh – kid or tease. (Hitchcock: 347)

Jumper – claim jumper, especially along the much contested beach placers in the early Nome stampede. (Grinnell: 73)

-K-

Kanin – dugout canoes, highly carved and painted, of cedar wood used by the Coast Indians of Southeast Alaska. (Davis: 34)

Kibosh – to put a sudden end to something. (Tuck: 75)

Kick – complain, growl.

Kicker – complainer.

King – the cone-shaped piece of gold from which drillings are taken during the assay process.

King of the Klondike – nickname of the wealthy claim-owner and speculator, “Big” Alexander Macdonald, reputed to be the richest man during the Klondike boom, but who died broke.

Kingpost – a mast-like upright stubbed into the center keelson of a steamboat. Towering over the topdeck, it was connected by adjustable iron braces to the bow and stern. As there was no outside keel on steamboats, the arrangement was necessary to prevent the long, shallow-draft hull from sagging. See also hog-chains. (Downs: 14)

Klondicitis – newspaper diagnosis of the gold fever that gripped the country following announcements of the Klondike discovery in summer, 1897.

Klondike – gold district encompassing the Klondike river and its tributaries, corruption of Indian ‘Tron-deg,’ or hammer-water, from the days when natives staked nets into the river to catch fish. (Ogilvie: 117)

Klondike Army – the crush of men on the trail enroute to the goldfields. (Roehr: 3)

Klondike caps – caps mostly of fur, with a heavy piece across the forehead, and thick flaps that fold over the ears and around the neck and chin. (Davis: 113)

Klondike City – town that grew across and upstream from Dawson, whose citizens derisively nicknamed it “Lousetown.”

Klondike fever – gold fever.

Klondike King – any of the wealthy claim-owners in the Klondike district.

Klondike News – a one-issue, illustrated journal of biographical articles on the wealthy Klondike mine owners and their claims, published in San Francisco in April, 1898 by “Arizona” Charlie

Meadows. An ex-Wile West showman and scout, Meadows was owner of the Palace Grand Theater in Dawson City. (Lynch: 330)

Klondike prices – the exorbitant cost of goods in Dawson during the stampede. (Lynch: 135)

Knock in, knock under – to accede to the wishes of others. (Milroy: 4) Be defeated.

-L-

Lagging – green wood piled on and against the fuel set next to the wall of a drift, producing a smoldering heat for thawing the frozen ground. (Stanley: 111)

the Lakes – Lakes Lindeman & Bennett, headwaters of the Yukon River. (Ironmonger-Sola: 56)

Laudanum – a tincture of opium, occasionally mixed with alcohol, bottled and sold for medical purposes.

Law of mine and thine – the law governing order on the trails: touch no man's cache but your own. (Davis: 67)

Lay – a contract with a claim-owner to lease and work a portion of the claim for a return, usually fifty percent, of the profits.

Lay it to – blame or attribute to. “Many of them are ill, and they lay it to the gold hunters.” (Grinnell: 21)

Layman – a man working a lay.

Lay to – take, grab up. (Hitchcock: 310)

Lead boxes – the upper boxes in a line of sluices, usually set on a ½-inch grade. The following four to six boxes are then set at a 6-inch grade, the last on an 8-inch grade, and the dump box on a 5-inch grade. (Adney: 234) See also []-inch grade.

Leader – the lead sled dog in harness. (Grinnell: 45)

Legal post – “a stake or a stump standing four feet above the ground and squared on four sides for at least one foot from the top.” (PM: 46)

Lemon – a disagreeable person, a loser; a losing proposition. (Walden: 120)

Let a lay – to let a lease to work a lay. (Tuck: 89)

Life rope – a rope used by groups coming down Chilkoot Pass in a snowstorm. All would grip the rope and grope their way down, so as not to lose anyone. (McMichael: 28)

Lighter – barge. (McKeown: 26)

Limits – the sides of the valley along a creek, hence the right limit refers to the right bank going downstream. (Rickard: 206)

Lindeman, Lindeman City – settlement at the start of the Yukon River headwaters on Lake Lindeman. Also spelled Lindemann, Linderman.

Line down – to assist and control a boat over rough water by a line from the river shore. (Conger: 151)

Lining – see line down.

Live tough – survive on slender resources.

Living high and sleeping up-garrot – doing well, living comfortably. (Tuck: 47)

Loblock – in Alaska, Laplander in government service. (Jordan: 36)

Locality – “the territory along a river (tributary of the Yukon River) and its affluents.” (PM: 46)

Locate (mining claim; a claim) – to find, stake, and make notification on the site that a placer claim has been reserved. (Tuck: 47)

Location notice – a marked notice at or near the center of the claim which the claimant’s name, location number, and date. The claimant had sixty days in which to record his claim with the gold commissioner.

Location stakes – the staked corners of a mining claim. The stakes were to be four feet tall, squared at the top, numbered consecutively, and the ground cleared of brush providing a clear border from stake to stake.

Lode – a fissure in a rock formation that is filled with metalliferous ore.

Log driving – hauling felled and trimmed trees to a river for transport to a downstream sawmill. (Tuck: 46)

Logging permit – a license obtained for a fee from Canadian authorities for the right to cut and sell logs or engage in lumbering. (Tuck: 47)

The long green – to strike it rich—the bit money. (Roehr: 29)

Long Hill – the long three mile ascent from outside Sheep Camp to the Scales on the Chilkoot Trail.

Long mush – a long trip or journey. (Chase: 187)

Long on...short on – to have an abundance of one item and a shortage of another.

Long-tailed sugar – molasses, which in the cold turned into a viscous black paste. (Davis: 114)

Long tom – developed in the California gold rush after the rocker and before the sluice box, the tom was a rough trough 12 feet long, 15 to 20 inches wide at the top, 30 inches wide at bottom, and 8 inches deep. It was set at an angle, and contained riffles and a perforated sheet iron plate to sort out rocks. (PM: 98)

Long Trail – the grueling Ashcroft Trail. (Garland: 185)

Lookout – a person who assisted a gambling house dealer by seeing that no bets were “overlooked” and guarded against cheating. (Adney: 342)

Look-out – situation, view. “If you chose to butt in on my business that’s your look-out—you came up of your own wills and now you can bloody well freeze...” (Graham: 139)

Louse Hill – short, steep ascent near Dawson by the Klondike River, which had to be crossed to reach Bonanza and Eldorado creeks.

Lousetown – Klondike City, known particularly for its red light district.

Lower country – outside; the States; the lower contiguous United States. (Adney: 339)

Low-grade ground – a poor-paying placer claim

Lucky as a Swede – a lucky person; after Charley “Lucky Swede” Anderson, who was sold a million-dollar Klondike claim while in a drunken stupor at Fortymile, paying \$800. (Berton: 59)

-M-

M.P. – mounted policemen of the NWMP. (Walden: 102)

Mackenzie & Mann – a construction company under Canadian government contract to build a wagon road between Teslin Lake and Telegraph Creek on the Stikine River, but which was cancelled following construction of the WP&YR Railroad.

Make a clean-up – to make a profit on some deal or business proposition. (Chase: 169)

Make a kick – register a complaint.

Make (a, yours, my, their) pile – to get rich, make a pile of money. (Hitchcock: 167)

Make game – make fun of someone. (Hitchcock: 375)

Make the raise – to earn enough in mining to buy an outfit for the next season’s prospecting; to earn enough in mining with which to go home and finance a farm or business.

Make the snub – to make fast a boat or raft while floating downstream to post or tree. (Tuck: 44)

Making wages – working a claim whose return is enough to pay expenses and then some. Eight-cent pans were considered wages in placer prospecting; a claim that averaged five-cent pans was considered poor wages.

Mazuma – money. “A sign tacked on a tent pole, informed the public, that “No Credit—You must produce the mazuma. We are not in business for our health.” (Chase: 97)

Medico – doctor. (Grinnell: 21)

Mess box – box fitted up to carry food items and utensils. (McMichael: 31) Also: grub box.

Mile's Canyon – mile-long, Upper Yukon canyon named in 1883 by Lt. Frederick Schwatka in honor of his military expedition sponsor, Gen. Nelson Miles.

Milk, milking – manipulation of a card deck by a cheat, who takes cards from the top and bottom of the deck simultaneously. (Jordan: 188) Also called 'snowing.'

Miner's cabin – small log cabin invariably found throughout the Klondike 12 by 14 feet with walls six and gables eight feet high. The roof was heavily earthed; as a warm but rarely ventilated quarters, it was occupied by as many as four men at a time.

Miner's inch – a measure varying according to district to determine the discharge of water in placer mining. Generally, a miner's inch is "that quantity of water which will pass through an opening of 1-square-inch area under a mean pressure, or head, of 6 inches." (PM: 78)

Miner's law – the state of affairs in Alaska prior to the Klondike, where absence of central government authority was filled by local self-rule through miners' meetings. The meetings decided through one man, one vote fashion matters pertaining to local law, mining regulation, and punishment of crime.

Miner's meeting – meetings posted and called in Alaska mining camps to settle disputes, make law, and mete out punishment. An American frontier tradition since 1849, the meetings were outlawed following establishment of territorial and federal courts.

Moniker – name, nickname, alias. (Jordan, 74)

Monitor – the nozzle of a high-pressure hose used in hydraulicking.

Moore's Landing – initial designation of Skagway, after its founder, William Moore.

Moosehide – the landmark depression or scar on the mountain outside Dawson. (Bronson: 115) The Indian village downstream of Dawson. (Davis: 147)

Moosehide Mountain – mountain above Dawson distinguished by the depression-like scar visible for miles. (Davis: 99)

Moose ranch – derisive term for a worthless claim.

Mooresville – the later site of Skagway, established as a homestead by Captain William Moore and his son, J. Bernard Moore, in 1886.

Moran Brothers Company – the Seattle shipbuilding firm of John and Robert Moran, whose yards located at the present-day site of the Kingdome¹ produced a substantial number of Yukon riverboats.

¹ Now (2005) the site of Qwest Field.

Mother lode – the main concentration of gold in a placer or quartz region; it was believed that placer gold discoveries pointed to quartz deposits whose veins in turn converged on the mother lode. The Klondike remained only a placer region.

Mountain feathers – bedding on the rocky ground.

Muck – the semi-frozen mud just below the surface of the ground, “mucked out” with shovels.

Mud-box – a tub of water kept near the cabin stove to keep from freezing, and used to pan samples of pay-dirt during the day to ensure that drifting was indeed following the paystreak.

Mud Lake – nickname of Lake Marsh due to the glacial deposits of mud along its shores. (Davis: 75)

Muley – a vertical saw in a sawmill, which cut up and down and was usually later replaced or supplemented by more efficient circular saws. (Moore: 167)

Mush, mushing – to travel, particularly on foot.

Mushers – stampedeers who hauled their own outfit on foot. (Davis: 53)

Mush-ice – soft ice just forming in a river approaching freeze-up, rapidly bringing all water transportation to a halt. (Burnham: 77)

-N-

Name yours – invitation to drink. (White: 52)

Necking, necking a sled – pulling a Yukon sled, especially while using a trumpline around the forehead to assist.

Nervous “prostitution” – wry word play on nervous prostration. (Heller: 134)

Newspaper row – street in Dawson where over a dozen reporters from the city’s three daily newspapers lived. (White: 71)

Nickname – a name usually bestowed in the Alaska-Yukon region to distinguish between other persons of similar name, based on highly personal characteristics, and never used to the individual’s face.

Nigger heads – clumps of tufted grass, mud and moss that made for difficult walking. (Grinnell: 64)

’97 Stampede – post 1897 designation in Klondike for the gold rush.

No account – a person, thing, or proposition that is deemed of little value. (Tuck: 41)

“No matter which you’ll take, you’ll which you’d taken the other” – common response to query as to whether to take the Chilkoot or White Pass route to Bennett. (Downs: 142)

Nome stampede – the rush to Nome in spring 1899 depopulated Dawson and ended the Klondike experience, which since Autumn 1898 had been declining. (Downs: 148)

Nondescripts – the old-timers in the Klondike, professional long-term prospectors; as opposed to the newcomers fresh from a variety of professions and walks of life. (Adney: 273)

North American Trading and Transportation Company (N.A. T. &T.) – the company, which with its rival, the Alaska Commercial Company, held a monopoly on Alaska-Yukon trade. The Chicago-based trading firm was headed by Portus B. Weare and his son Ely, with John J. Healy serving in Dyea and Dawson as general manager.

North West Mounted Police (N.W.M.P.) – a special constabulary created in 1873 by the Canadian government to establish and preserve the law in the Canadian West, and thereby avoid the lawless condition of frontier settlement characteristic of the U.S. West. Today's descendent is the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Northern Commercial Company (N.C.C.) – established on June 1, 1901 as a consolidation of the Alaska Exploration Company and the long-lived Alaska Commercial Company. The merger represented changing business conditions as the Yukon entered a period of long-term development. (Lynch: 351)

Nugget, the Klondike Nugget – a popular periodical published by ex-Seattle newsman Gene Allen in Dawson. (Chase: 121)

-O-

Oakum – a hemp used in rope making combined with pitch to caulk seams in boats—the oakum serving as binder.

“Of the Portus beware” – Yukon byword for the Portus B. Weare, the first steamboat of the N.A.T.&T., constructed in 1892 at St. Michael. Its basic accommodations were exaggerated in company advertisements, hence the ironic play on words. (Burlingame: 313)

Ogilvie Commission of Inquiry – convened following pressure by miners and the Klondike Nugget newspaper, the commission was charged with examining allegations of malfeasance in the office of Gold Commissioner under Thomas Fawcett. Chaired by William Ogilvie, the commission found evidence of corruption, and though it exonerated Fawcett personally, it sullied his reputation.

Oil clothing – canvas clothing treated for waterproof wear; also rubberized canvas raingear.

“Old man Harper” – nickname for long-time Alaska trader Arthur Harper.

Old soak – a person overly fond of or addicted to alcohol. (Tuck: 94)

One Mile River – the boulder-strewn river connecting Lake Lindemann to Lake Bennett, roughly one mile in length. (Shand: 91)

On one's own hook – to have full responsibility or investment in a venture; to be on one's own.

On tap – to be ready. (Roehr: 14)

On the beg – a person known for a knack of begging or getting something from someone for nothing. (Judge: 223)

On the bum – to be doing poorly; state of decline. (Roehr: 27)

On the hog train – a lazy or worthless person, especially a non-productive group member. (Tuck: 79)

On the inside – persons in the know; to hold information worth a price, especially as regards claim-recorders employed in the gold commissioners office. (Tuck: 57)

On the loaf – to relax; to be lazy. (Tuck: 80)

On the mend – recovering from an injury or illness. (Tuck: 99)

On the square – honest, trustworthy. (Jordan: 181)

On the string – planned or lined up.

On the wait – delayed or waiting. (Tuck: 94)

One man's dog – to pull a lead oneself assisted by one sled-dog.

Open-cast mining – see summer work.

Open-cut mining – see summer work. (Rickard: 220)

Order up – to call for drinks for oneself, one's friends, or the entire house.

Ounce -- \$16.00, the amount of an ounce of gold in transacting business, and often used in place of a dollar price for goods on sale—hence, an item listed as “two ounces” rather than \$32.00) (CR:260)

Ounces to the shovel – the amount of gold retrieved by one man shoveling gravel into a sluice box in one day (or other established period.) (Adney: 234)

(Be) out for Number One – to watch out for one's interests; also derisively. (Conger: 144)

Outcrop – signs of a vein visible in rock jutting from steep gulleys and on ridges. (CR: 99)

Outfit – one's entire supply of food and gear; the acquisition and purchase (outfitting) or supplies.

Out of sight – out of this world, particularly as regards the inflated cost of living and high prices found in the Klondike. (Tuck: 21)

Outside, go outside – the outside world as perceived in Alaska and the Yukon; particularly the lower contiguous United States; to leave the North for home.

Outside dogs – any dog brought into the country from the States, particularly those not bred for the climate and hard work of sledding in the North. (Walden: 216)

-P-

P.I. – acronym for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer newspaper.

Pacific & Arctic Railway and Navigation Company – corporation formed in March, 1898 under the laws of West Virginia to obtain charter to build White Pass & Yukon Route railroad through Alaska.

Pacific Coast Steamship Company – a Seattle transportation firm active in the Klondike rush, whose late-1897 ocean fleet included the steamships Queen, City of Topeka, and Al-Ki.

The Packer's Rest – a shack at Sheep Camp which served as a club for professional packers on the Chilkoot Trail. (Berton: 248)

Paddlewheeler – shallow draft steamboat.

Paddy – Irishman. (Tuck: 98)

Paddy work – manual labor, shovel work. (Tuck: 95)

Pan – to prospect with a gold pan.

Pan out – to retrieve a certain amount of gold per pan of gravel (see []-cent pan); a claim or any other proposition that may or may not have succeeded or “panned out.”

Paperlegs – tenderfoot. (Spurr: 24)

Paradise alley – the red light district characterized by a row of cribs along an alley or street, likely derived from the corruption of the popular 1890's sentimental song, “The Sunshine of Paradise Alley,” whose first verse goes: “There's a little side street such as often you meet/Where the boys of a Sunday night rally/Tho' it's not very wide and it's dismal beside/Yet they call the place Paradise Alley...”

Paris of Alaska – the boast of Circle City prior to the Klondike discovery. More accurately, “the largest log-cabin city in the world.” (Webb: 911) Population in 1896: 700.

Pay – gold, especially in a quantity which justifies one's labors in working a placer.

Paydirt, pay dirt – rich placer ground.

Pay dump – see dump. (Lynch: 319)

Payer – a productive creek, gulch, or claim. (USGS Spurr: 116)

Paystreak, pay streak – the ribbon of gold-laden soil laid down over geologic time, usually found at bedrock level and recovered by drifting.

Perfesh – reference to membership in the gambling profession. (White: 130)

Perry Davis's Painkiller – a popular patent medicine used by some in the Yukon as a primitive thermometer, due probably to its high alcohol content.

Peter out – to dwindle out, disappear.

Peterson's trail, Petterson trail – the alternate route over Chilkoot summit from the Scales, which required the use of block and tackle to winch the loaded sleds up. Less abrupt but probably as grueling as the Golden Stairs.

Philosopher – a professional gambler who cheats. (Jordan: 188)

Picked pan – a pan of gold-laden soil taken knowingly from the richest part of a dump or paystreak to demonstrate the richness of the claim—as opposed to one “shoveled square” at random into the pay. (Adney: 140)

Pinched – arrested. (White: 148) Also: stolen.

Pit – sawpit.

Placer – an alluvial or glacial deposit of sand or gravel containing particles of gold.

Placer mining – the locating and working of a placer claim, separating free gold from the uncovered or exposed paystreak by washing in pan, rocker, or sluice.

Played out – a claim that no longer produces (Tuck: 87); also, a state of physical exhaustion.

Play for a sucker – to take advantage of a gullible person, particularly in a financial sense. (Wiedemann: 223)

Pleasant Camp – a third settlement on the Chilkoot Trail, following Finnegan's Point and Canyon City, and located at the upper reach of the Dyea River canyon.

Plunder – personal or group belongings, also called “traps.” (Conger: 177)

Point – see steam point. (Rickard: 273)

Poke – a leather pouch for carrying gold dust, usually sewn from tough moose hide.

Pole climbing route – to go outside by way of the upper – to go outside by way of the upper Yukon, poling upstream in a boat against the current to Lake Bennett, thence overland via the Chilkoot or White Pass trails. (Moore: 81)

Pole out – to leave the country by following the “pole climbing route.”

Poor fish – poor wretch. (Tuck: 49)

Poor man's country – erroneous belief that the Klondike country was conducive to men of small means, where little personal capital was needed to exist while looking for gold.

Poor man's gold – placer gold, already partially mined and separated by nature. (Webb: 77)

Poor man's mining – placer mining.

Poor man's rush – the Klondike rush to summer 1899, when ground was staked and developed by capital-intensive companies to the exclusion of the individual prospector.

Poor Man's Trail – Chilkoot Trail, on which passage was free, unlike the toll road of the White Pass trail. (Davis: 46)

Poor prospects – pessimistic or negative estimate of the future outlook of a claim or any general proposition.

Poor wages – poor returns on a placer claim; placer ground with an average yield of five-cent pans.

“Pope of Alaska” – Edgar Mizner, whose imperial manner while manager of the Alaska Commercial Company at St. Michael earned this nickname from his down-to-earth customers. (Berton: 261)

Porcupine Hill – a roller-coaster stretch of the White Pass Trail reached after Devil's Hill, where the route threaded between huge boulders. (Berton: 153)

Portus B. Weare – the first NAT&T steamboat launched September 1892 at St. Michael and at that time the largest steamboat on the Yukon, 175 feet long, 28 foot beam, and a hold 4 feet deep. Named after a founder of the company. (Burlingame: 313)

Potlatch – the native tradition of holding banquets at which time the host gives away his entire property to enhance his tribal standing. Potlatches were given in honor of personal and tribal celebrations, weddings, funerals, and holidays in which all took part. (Conger: 250)

Power-of-attorney scheme – the locating of claims for others absent, practiced to some extent in the Klondike and frequently in Nome, and much opposed by long-time prospectors and newcomers alike. (McMichael: 49)

Prairie Route – the misleadingly named Ashcroft Trail, which led through forests and mountains between which was scarcely a trace of prairie. (Garland: 7)

Precipitate a rough-house – start a quarrel or fight. (Grinnell: 53)

Present tense: mine; past tense: miner; perfect participle: minus – bitter play on words illustrating the financial risk of placer mining. (Jordan: 69)

Professional women – prostitutes. (Davis: 43)

Progression – see Cowards' martingale.

Proper encouragement – bribery (Jordan: 89), particularly in recording claims, obtaining mail, or getting through customs in a timely manner.

Proposition – any task, job, position, offer, prospect, or angle which holds the possibility of personal gain or advancement.

Prospect hole – a hole dug for gravel samples, which were then taken to water and panned out. (Conger: 125)

Prospects – one's estimation of the richness of a particular claim or area; one's plans for the near future; also as in outlook or "possibilities," good or poor.

Prospect shaft –prospect hole. (Wiedemann: 188)

Prove (up) a claim – to begin mining work on a placer claim.

Puddling box – a six-foot-square box filled eighteen inches deep with water and gold-bearing clay. The clay is broken up by stirring with a rake, the resulting material then washed in a pan or rocker. (PM: 97)

Pull – influence.

Pump – to encourage or draw out information from a person who is hesitant or loathe to reveal it. (Chase: 126)

Pup – side stream, subsidiary gulch, or tributary of a stream or creek. (Davis: 91)

Puppyfoot – in cards, the ace of clubs. (Jordan: 189)

The push – the crowd, the rest of the people on the trail.

Push the booze over the wood – description of bartending in Skagway.

Put in (his, their, your, my) face – feed one's face; eat a meal. (Tuck: 50)

-Q-

Quartz gold, quartz mining – lode mining in which gold, found in ore, is separated through an elaborate chemical process. Placer mining was thought to lead to quartz mining on other mining frontiers, but such was not the case in the Klondike.

Queen City – Seattle, so called by its inhabitants.

Queen Vic's domain – English (Canadian) territory symbolically reigned over by Queen Victoria.

Quesnel, Quesnelle – a trading camp for the Caribou Mining Company adjacent to the Caribou (or Cariboo) goldfields of British Columbia, serving also as a supply point for stamperders on the Ashcroft Trail. (Garland: 21)

Question box – a game to relieve monotony, where questions would be written on paper slips addressed to individuals, who then had to answer the serious or humorous query before the group. (Grinnell: 35)

Quicksilver – mercury, used in the retrieval of gold by amalgamation.

Quit the country – to depart the Yukon country for home. (Tuck: 93)

Quit the crowd – to leave one's party and go home; derisively, to abandon one's friends on the trail.

-R-

Rafters – tress bent over a river due to bank erosion, forcing one to duck when floating beneath. (Grinnell: 23)

Raise the bump – excite one's interests. (Roehr: 11)

The Rapids – White Horse Rapids

Real sourdough – in later years, the term to denote the first arrivals to the Klondike. (White: 120)

Record, recording – the registering of one's claim with the gold commissioner in Canada, or in Alaska, with a legally elected or appointed district recorder. Generally, one had sixty days in which to record the claim upon staking, after which time the unrecorded claim could be taken and recorded by someone else.

Red Coat, Redcoat – Canadian mounted policeman. (Heller: 133)

Representative season – a period of 30 to 90 days set by the gold commissioner, usually after consultation with the miners, in which recorded claims must be represented (i.e. worked) by the miner or his proxy. If unworked for a period of 72 hours or more in the season, the claim was considered abandoned. (Stanley: 116)

Retort – an iron canister with a long-necked spout used for the retorting of amalgam. Sealed inside, the amalgam was heated and the mercury retrieved through condensation, the gold being left inside. (For large-scale retorts see PM: 121)

Retorting – the process of separating the gold and mercury amalgam by heating in a retort. (PM: 120)

Rich man's route – the expensive all-water route to the Klondike via St. Michael, Alaska, thence up the Yukon by river steamboat to Dawson.

Rifle box – sluice box. (Ironmonter-Sola: 79)

Riffles – bars of wood or angle iron fastened to the bottom of a sluice box, or arranged in a removable framework, which trapped gold during the sluicing process.

Rim, rimrock – the upturn of bedrock in the slopes of a valley, which constituted the original width of Klondike creek claims 'from rimrock to rimcock.' (Walden: 210)

River driver – logger who directs or drives a lumber raft to a downstream sawmill. (Tuck: 111)

Road house – a cabin or tent used to provide food and lodging to travelers along the trail. (Tuck: 70)

Roasting – retorting amalgam to separate gold from mercury, usually accomplished in a cast iron retort. Those who tried to roast amalgam in a spoon or shovel over a flame found themselves exposed to mercury vapors and their gold absorbed into the implement. (CR: 16)

Rocker – box containing a grizzly and apron for gold separation by washing. Rocked like a baby's cradle, and hence was also called a cradle. Alleged to have been invented by Chinese miners during the California gold rush.

Roll-up – meeting, discussion.

Rope in – fooled, tricked, taken advantage of. (Wiedemann: 190)

Root hog or die – pioneer slogan meaning to get to work or starve. (Tuck: 77)

Rough-lock – see rough shod.

Rough shod – a rope affixed around the runner of a loaded Yukon sled to slow it in descending steep hills. (McMichael: 31) Also: rough locked.

Rounder – a person, usually a woman, who lured young women north on false pretenses to work in houses of prostitution. (Chase: 24)

Rubber blanket – a ground cloth of rubberized canvas used in making a cap bed. (McMichael: 35)

Rubbing – rubber-necking.

Rube – an unsophisticated person, particularly from the country, and an easy mark for con-men. (White: 39)

Run out of water – the furthest a steamboat can travel up a tributary before encountering low water and turning back. (Downs: 149)

Russian bath – a sweat bath, made by pouring water in heated stones in a sealed cabin. (CR: 263)

Russian furnace – “an oven made of three thick sides of baked clay covered with a large sheet of iron, the open end being fitted with a sliding door.” (Adney: 198)

Rustle (up) – to locate or prepare, as in to rustle up dinner.

-S-

Saint of Dawson – Jesuit priest William S. Judge, whose self-sacrificing assistance to stricken miners resulted in Dawson's first hospital and his own premature death. (Berton: 73)

Salt – intent to defraud on the sale of a claim by planting the site or drift with gold taken from other sources.

Salt horse – salt pork; bacon. (Grinnell: 11)

Sandbag – a pouch of sand used to knock someone unconscious in a robbery; to assault someone in such a manner.

Sandbag hand – in a card game, a decisive or, if gambling, a devastating hand.

Sawpits – raised platforms for supporting logs during whipsawing. (Berton: 270)

Scales – “At the foot of the Chilkoot a man named Archie Burns set up a steelyard scales for the use of the professional packers who made a business of toting freight to the summit.” (Davis: 53)

Scared water – watered-down alcohol. (White: 17)

Scouse – sailor’s stew of meat, vegetables, and hardtack; from lobsouse. (Grinnell: 11)

Scow – a flat-bottomed boat, usually sharply upturned fore and aft, shallow draft and capable of carrying heavy loads. Probably the easiest boat to construct out of green lumber, there being no need to bow or bend planks to fit a rounded hull.

Scrambles – scrambled eggs. (Grinnell: 67)

Scrap – fight, argument, disagreement. (Grinnell: 67)

Scurvy – a debilitating illness characterized by swollen gums and extremities, a yellowing of the skin and pain in the joints. Untreated it led to death. Causes were a lack of fresh fruit and vegetables in the diet over a prolonged time. See also black leg, big jaw.

Scurvy trail – winter camp trails established for exercise of scurvy victims, the disease thought to be caused by malnutrition and lack of exercise. (Grinnell: 51)

Seasonal frost – ground that freezes in the winter to a depth of 3 to 5 feet, thawing in the summer. (Rickard: 222)

Seattle-Yukon Trading Company – established by ex-Seattle mayor William D. Wood in 1897, the company had an office in Dawson City and branches at points along the Yukon River. It was sold by Wood in summer, 1901, to Northern Commercial and Northern Navigation Companies. Wood returned to Seattle. (Lynch: 351)

Sets – mine timbering, needed particularly in supporting longer tunnels. (Lynch: 208)

Shaft – vertical tunnel excavated to bedrock, requiring in the Klondike up to two months labor varying on the depth. A claim was usually ‘spotted’ with shafts until the paystreak was located and drifting begun.

Shallow diggings – a narrow, shallowly located paystreak whose excavation resulted in small dumps. (Wiedemann: 237)

Sharps – con men. (Davis: 45)

Sheep Camp – major boom-town 13 miles from Dyea on the Chilkoot Trail, and the jumping-off point for pack trips over Chilkoot Pass.

Sheer legs – the spars used on a steamboat to pull the stranded vessel off a sand bar. (Walden: 93)

Shell game men – con artists who played a fast-talking “find the pea” game, using walnut shells. (McMichael: 30)

Shoe pacs – rubber shoes with felt or woolen liners. (Davis: 104)

Shooting the chutes – descend the Chilkoot Pass by sitting and sliding down grooves worn in the packed snow, shooting to the bottom in seconds. (McMichael: 27)

Shovel work – summer work during clean-up, sluicing dumps of pay dirt.

Shoveling in – summer work. (CR: 228)

Shoveled square – a pan of gravel shoveled directly from the dump and washed to see how much gold was present, as opposed to a “picked” pan of deliberately chosen rich gravel.

“Show me you are a man of means and take my money” – cry of the shell game men in Sheep Camp in 1898.

Side-doors – any of a number of alternate trails to the Klondike beside the Skagway/Dyea and St. Michael all-water routes. (Garland: 6)

Side-partnership – separate groups that joined and traveled the trail together. (Garland: 187)

Sidewheeler – a steamboat with paddlewheels on the center sides of the vessel, seldom found on such shallow rivers as the Yukon.

Silver Bow Basin – 1880 gold strike at the site first called Harrisburg, subsequently renamed Juneau. (Adney: 235)

Siwash – contemptuous term for an Indian; also a white squaw-man. Carmack’s nickname prior to the Klondike discovery was Siwash George.

Siwash socks – socks cut out of heavy Hudson’s Bay blankets for wearing inside moccasins. (Adney: 23)

Siwashing – moving one’s outfit alone on a sled without dogs.

Skaguay Trail – White Pass Trail.

Skid road – road or pathway cleared for hauling felled timber to a sawmill, sawpit, or construction site.

Skim diggings – an area affording bare traces of gold, but not enough to warrant working. (Adney: 321)

Skin, skinned – to cheat someone out of his money. (McMichael: 21)

Skirt – a woman; a wimpish man. (White: 68)

Skookum – Indian word meaning strong.

Skookum house – strong house, i.e. a jail. (Rickard: 186)

Skunk – an empty pan devoid of colors after panning.

Skunked – deceived, disappointed, particularly as regards the worthlessness of a claim initially thought promising.

Slapjacks – pancakes, flapjacks. (Ironmonger-Sola: 72)

Slaughter Pen – goldseekers' nickname of the dangerous White Horse Rapids on the Upper Yukon River.

Sledge – sled.

Sleeping robe – a sleeping bag constructed of sewn furs, lighter and more preferable than blankets or conventional sleeping bags.

Slick – a smooth, potentially threatening person or adversary. (Jordan: 203)

The Slide – the depression-like scar on the mountain above Dawson, also nicknamed Moosehide. (Davis: 140)

Sluice, sluicing – the separation of placer gold from lighter dirt and gravel by washing in sluice boxes (box sluicing) or in a trench cut into bedrock (ground sluicing.)

Sluice box – a trough of boards with riffle bars to capture gold. Paydirt was shoveled into a stream of water gushing through the boxes thereby separating gold from the lighter gravels, which were washed out. Usually required a series of boxes set out in long rows. See also long tom.

Sluice head – sufficient water to begin and maintain a sluicing operation. (Ironmonger-Sola: 79)

Slumming – to visit around, stay with and be fed by friends.

Slush ice – broken ice that jam, loosen, and flow down a thawing river or freezing river. (Stanley: 90)

Smith's Alaska Guards – Jefferson "Soapy" Smith's volunteer company, enlisted in Skagway following the outbreak of the Spanish American War. Smith's offer of the company to the federal government was politely declined. (White: 17)

Smudge – a smoky fire built of damp or green wood as a screen against mosquitoes. (Roehr: 11)

Snag rooms – watertight compartments between the main deck and hull of a steamboat, which maintained enough buoyancy in the event of a puncture to get the vessel to shore. (Downs: 14)

Snags – exposed tree roots just below the surface of a river, posing a navigation hazard. (Conger: 244)

Snail out – to squirm a pack animal out of deep mud. (Garland: 153)

Snake-bite cure – whiskey. (Davis: 66)

Snow goggles – smoked-glass goggles worn in winter to prevent snow blindness.

Snub – to make fast a boat or raft to an on-shore tree, stump, or post. (Tuck: 44)

Snubbing post – a tree, post, or stump on which to tie fast a boat, scow, or log raft. (Tuck: 46)

Soft patch – a wad of oakum slapped against a hold in a steamboat hull and held in place by a post wedged against the deck—serving as a temporary repair. If oakum was not available, sacks of flour or anything else soft was used. (Downs: 14)

Sourbelly – a disagreeable sourdough or old-timer. (Grinnell: 29)

Sourdough – a longtime resident of Alaska or the Yukon, though after the Klondike loosely applied to anyone who had lived through a far northern winter. Stemmed from the use of sourdough as a leavening for bread, and perhaps, from the use of the alcohol from fermented sourdough for distilling hooch.

Sourdough stiff – irreverent name for sourdoughs similar to “old fogey” in intent. “The longer a man stays in this country the less he knows. If he stays here long enough he gets so he don’t know nawthin’.” (Adney: 268)

Span – fornicate. (Jordan: 181)

Specific gravity – the ratio of the mass of a solid or liquid to the mass of an equal volume of distilled water at 4 degrees Centigrade. Gold has a specific gravity of 19, i.e. 19 times heavier in mass to an equal volume of water.

Spiflication – a jag; spree; jamboree; jollification; drinking bout.

Spinal come-and-get-us – slang for the spinal meningitis outbreaks along the trails. (Davis: 43)
Also: spinal come-to-Jesus.

Split-Up City – see Split-Up Island. (Berton KQ: 98)

Split-Up Island – site on Yukon River hours away from Dawson where partnerships dissolved and outfits split, often literally. As the goal was finally in reach, old arguments resurfaced as trail partners decided they no longer needed each other. (Berton KQ: 98)

Spot – to dig several shafts on a claim in order to locate and follow a paystreak.

Spotted – streaks of gold found in inconsistent patterns across a claim. (Grinnell: 76)

Spread out a little – cutting or watering down whiskey to expand a saloon's profits. (Jordan: 88)

Spree – a jag, or drinking bout.

Square – a square meal; a straight woman not engaged in prostitution.

Square – honest, dependable. (Hitchcock: 196)

Square person – an honest, square-dealing individual. (Jordan: 12)

Squatter's right – occupying a given area without title, deed, or claim. Used to describe beach diggings at Nome and setting up a cabin on public domain.

Squatter's title – squatter's right. (Jordan: 54)

Squaw dance – a miner's hop or dance where the only female participants are Indians.

Squaw man – a white who married or cohabited with an Indian woman.

Squeezers – a fixed card deck whose edges were marked, and distinguishable in the hands of a card sharp. (Jordan: 188)

Stampeding – to stop work and head for a rumored gold strike. “(You) stampedin’?” (Adney: 257)

Stand the treat – treat to a round of drinks. (Milroy: 12)

Starvation winter – winter 1889-90, remembered by oldtimers, when a series of accidents prevented the riverboats from supplying Fortymile before freeze-up. (Spurr: 4/27) The memory likely brought about the Canadian regulation during the Klondike stampede that each man bring a year's supply of provisions.

The States – the lower contiguous United States.

Stave-off – a snack to “stave-off” hunger. (Davis: 143)

Steamer – an ocean-going steamship; also, a river steamboat.

Steam-point – iron points connected by hoses to a generator used for thawing frozen ground with steam, the points driven deeper into the ground as thawing increased. Also called sweater.

Steam thawing – the use of generators and steam-points to thaw frozen ground for placer mining, largely supplanting thawing by fire after 1899.

Steerer – a person hired to steer newcomers toward a particular hotel, saloon, gambling hall, or dance hall.

Sternwheeler – river steamboat propelled by a stern paddlewheel.

Stick Indians – Interior tribes who traded with the coastal Indians, the Chilkats. (Moore: 92)

Stickine Route – an alternate route to the Klondike via the inside passage to Wrangell, thence by steamboat to Glenora and afoot to Lake Teslin and the Yukon River. Also: Stikine Trail.

Stockade – in Nome, the centrally-located red-light district. (Jordan: 217)

Stone House – a huge overhanging boulder above Sheep Camp on the Chilkoot Trail, which afforded a natural shelter for resting stampedees until swept away by an avalanche.

Straight gambling – gambling that is on the square—no cheating or rigged games allowed. Dawson's gambling halls were "straight" operations. (CR: 264)

Straights – the women in Dawson not engaged in prostitution or other illicit traffic ("hooks.")

Straight tip – an inside tip, especially as regards mining properties. (Hitchcock: 242)

Streak – the ribbon of gold-laden paydirt lying on or above bedrock in a placer deposit.

Streaky – ill-tempered or meanstreaked, especially in reference to horses. (Garland: 16)

Strike – a gold discovery.

Strike a pile – see make a pile.

Strippers – a fixed card deck in which the cards have been shaved at the edges, distinguishable in the hands of a card sharp. (Jordan: 188)

Stripping muck – the process of removing muck located above gravel. This involved sluicing water from an uphill dam over the semi-frozen mud, after which picks were used to loosen and wash it away in preparation for ground sluicing. (Adney: 404)

Strung, strung along – kidded, tricked. (Heller: 128)

Stuck (on) – to be favorably impressed with someone or something. (Tuck: 24)

Style up – dress up.

Sucker – a person easily fooled out of his money.

Suckerville – the shantytown that sprang up around ex-Seattle Mayor W.D. Wood's Klondike discovery after his two steamboats were frozen in on the Yukon 800 miles away from Dawson in the winter of 1897-98. (Berton: 206)

Summer work – open-cast mining lasting from June to September, in which pits or cuts are opened and the gravel sluiced. The ground was thawed by the sun as it became more exposed. The work was muddy with negligible returns, and not as favored as winter work.

Summit Hill – a thousand-foot-climb on the White Pass Trail leading over the U.S./Canadian boundary, made treacherous by the mudholes and sharp granite slabs strewn about. (Berton: 153)

Sure-thing gambler – a gambler who preys on tenderfeet, making his own chances of winning a sure thing. (CR: 429)

Sure-thing men – con artists, especially in and around Skagway. (McMichael: 20)

Surface mining – working placer deposits found on or near the surface, as opposed to deep mining, working underground. (PM: 61)

Swamp out a trail – break trail, especially in advance of a sled. (Lynch: 334)

Sweater – see steam-point.

Sweating – steam-thawing, using portable steam-points.

Swasher – long trees whose roots were washed away, leaning low over the river and impeding boat travel. (Moore: 85)

Sweep – a long pole-like oar used to rudder or steer a large boat or raft, located at the stern of the vessel.

Sweeper – an overhanging tree branch along a river; a swasher.

-T-

Tagish House – NWMP station on the Yukon halfway between Lakes Tagish and Marsh, and the last custom inspection point enroute to Dawson. (Tuck: 30)

Tail box – two or three boxes just below the dump-box in a line of sluices, usually fitted with riffles, the last collection area for capturing gold. (Adney: 234)

Tailings – the dirt and stones worked over once in the rocker or sluice boxes.

Take—the kitty or bank in a gambling house against which bets were placed. (Jordan: 94)

Take in the burg – spend some time looking around Dawson. (Tuck: 111)

Take the back track – to leave the country, go outside. (Tuck: 51)

Tall rustling – hard work to achieve a specific goal. (Tuck: 77)

Telegraph Creek – the head of navigation on the Stikine, established 1866 as the river crossing of the proposed Old-New World telegraph line via Bering Strait. Site of trading post on the Stikine Trail during the Klondike rush.

Telegraph Creek Trail – see Ashcroft Trail.

Telegraph Route – the Ashcroft trail, which followed a northerly telegraph line the first leg of the trail. (Garland: 5)

Teslin Trail – the route from Telegraph Creek on the Stikine River to Teslin Lake and the Yukon, whose attraction lay with an ill-fated wagon road that was never completed. See Mackenzie & Mann.

Texas – top deck of a steamboat where the pilothouse was located.

That's what – common reply to “You bet.” (Hitchcock: 354)

Three Bs – bread, bacon, beans—the staples of the prospector's diet.

Three squares – three square meals (a day.)

Throndy – nickname of the Thronduck River prior to the gold discovery and its renaming to Klondike.

Tie up with – to join or partner up with. (Tuck: 47)

Tight, get tight – to be intoxicated.

Tile – hat.

Tin-cow – condensed milk. (Davis 143)

Tinhorn – greenhorn, tenderfoot, cheekako.

Touched – robbed.

Town dust – see trade gold.

Tracking – see tracking ground.

Tracking ground – towing a boat upriver by walking along the shore with a rope around the shoulders of one or more men. (Moore: 84)

Trade gold – the dust in ordinary circulation, valued at \$17/ounce until the arrival of banks in June 1898, when it was adjusted to \$16. This tended even so to be .50 more than actual value, due to the dirt and black sand usually left in it. In some transactions removal of the black sand with a magnet was required. (Adney: 417)

Trail of Agony and Shit – popular name of the White Pass Trail in 1897. (Burnham: 43)

Trail shoes – showshoes. (Adney: 222)

Traps – belongings, outfit. (Tuck: 60)

Trickle – chewing tobacco. (Heller: 132)

Trollop – a prostitute. (Jordan: 216)

Troubled with cold feet – an excuse for quitting the crowd to go home, i.e. apprehensive or fearful about pushing on. (Conger: 153)

Truck – supplies, equipment. (Garland: 17)

Tuckered out – tired. (McMichael: 31)

Turn of the scale – regular loss incurred in paying bills with gold dust, due to the custom of the weigher to skim a little dust off the top for himself. Bartenders frequently grew their fingernails long to capture gold dust weighted out, which they then wiped off on a damp sponge below the bar. (Adney: 347)

The Turtle-back – one of the worst sections leading to the summit of the White Pass trail. (Milroy: 1)

Twice '49 is '98 – reference to earlier, great gold rush. “We sometimes made numerical puns, about '98 being the second generation of '49, or '98 being two times as hard as '49.” (Davis: 39)

Two fingers – the amount of liquor in a glass or bottle equivalent to two fingers in depth. (White: 76)

Typhoid – highly infectious disease characterized by red rashes, high fever, and bronchitis transmitted by contaminated food and water. Caused by unsanitary waste disposal, typhoid was briefly rampant in Dawson.

-U-

Uncle Sam's domain – Alaska; U.S. territory. (Tuck: 42)

Used up – physically and mentally exhausted, especially those who arrived in Dawson and did not bother to prospect.

-V-

Valdez trail – see Copper River route.

Valley tan – rotgut whiskey or liquor, usually homemade. (White: 78)

Vaseline and Glycerine – popular names of two sisters, Jacqueline and Rosalinde, who worked in tandem as dance hall girls in Dawson. (Berton: 382)

Vein – a regularly shaped and lengthy occurrence of an ore.

Victuals – food, pronounced “vittles.”

-W-

Wages – eight cents to the pan, a good prospect worth following up. (Adney: 279)

Wait Patiently and You'll Ride – early derisive acronym of the White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad as it was beginning construction over White Pass.

Walking (a steamboat) – practice of steamboat captains to propel the vessel over sandbars by ramming with the paddlewheel. (Garland: 197)

Wash – gravel. (Rickard: 211)

Washington & Alaska Steamship Company – a Seattle transportation firm active in the Klondike gold rush, whose late-1897 ocean fleet consisted of the steamships City of Seattle and Rosalie.

Wash-up – see clean-up.

Waste dump – excavated dirt not containing gold, separated from the pay dump. (Lynch: 319)

Way-house – road-house, a tent or cabin established along a trail as an inn.

Weak sisters – any items not strong or adequate for accomplishing a job. “The (raft) pins are weak sisters as we only have an inch bit to make the holes with.” (Tuck: 43)

Wedges – in card hustling, a fixed deck in which the cards were trimmed to taper down one end, distinguishable in the hands of a card sharp. (Jordan: 188)

Weigher – the cashier who weighed gold dust in business transactions at stores, gambling halls, etc. (Johnston: 93)

Welch – to back out of a debt, deal or promise.

Whack-up – join up, “throw in with” someone. (Garland: 152)

Wheel-dog – sled-dog that is responsible for helping to turn the sled on the driver’s command by checking the momentum of the sled while the rest of the team swings right or left. (Graham: 182)

Whim – an endless cable installed prior to the construction of the aerial tramways over Chilkoot Pass, used to pull sleds up the slope. (Adney: 360)

Whipping – cutting planks or logs by whipsaw. (Grinnell: 24)

Whipsaw – the two-man saw used to cut planks from logs; also a descriptive term, i.e. whipsawing.

Whistleberries – beans. (Burnham: 47)

White Pass City – boom-town that materialized 12 miles up the White Pass Trail from Skagway, during 1897-1898.

White Pass & Yukon Route Railway – the railroad company registered 30 July 1898 to carry out the charters and concessions of the Pacific & Arctic Railway and Navigation Company, the British Columbia Yukon Railway Company, and the British Yukon Railway Company, in constructing a railroad from Skagway to Whitehorse via White Pass.

White Pass Trail – the 42-mile trail discovered in 1886 by William Moore and touted as a pack trail to the Yukon River headwaters, in competition with the Chilkoot Trail from nearby Dyea. Also: Skagway Trail.

Wide open – a town or camp which had every amusement and vice imaginable with which to separate men from their money. (Rickard: 171)

Wild-cat claims – claims hastily staked out during a rush to an area started by mere rumor; claims staked out without ascertaining the presence of gold.

Windlass men – men who cranked the windlass, adding buckets of paydirt from the mine shaft to the growing dumps. (Wiedemann: 229)

Winter dumps – see dumps.

Winter quarters – the removal of a steamboat from the river to a backwash off the channel in preparation for the winter freeze-up. (Tuck: 67)

Winter work – the season running from September to late July in the Klondike, in which underground mining is performed. Also called drift mining. (Adney: 251)

Wise Mike – wise guy. (Heller: 133)

Wood camp – river camp where wood was cut, stacked, and sold for fuel to passing steamboats. (Chase: 83)

Wooding up – the stopping of a steamboat at a woodyard for loading up on fuel, a process in which passengers occasionally assisted the crew. (Rickard: 176)

Worked out – dug out, excavated. (Tuck: 96)

-Y-

Yarn, yarning, yarn-spinning – story-telling, particularly exaggerated or comical stories for entertainment and to gull newcomers. (Jordan: 227)

Yellow-Legs – nickname for the Canadian Northwest Mounted Police, after the yellow stripes along the outside trouser seams. (Chase: 120)

Yodel – to call out, especially on the trail, when a member of the party is tired, and camp is made for the night. (Hitchcock: 171)

You bet – term of emphatic agreement. (Hitchcock: 354) See also that's what.

Yukon – Athabaskan Indian word "yukona" meaning "great river," recorded by Hudson's Bay traders in the 1840's

Yukon Council – Ottawa's representative governing board of the Yukon Territory; as an absentee government unresponsive to the people of the Yukon, the Council was plagued with sloth and inefficiency. (Lynch: 321)

Yukon Expedition – 1887 Canadian surveying expedition led by George Dawson and including Richard McConnell and William Ogilvie. Dispatched to survey the Yukon following preliminary surveys by Americans Frederick Schwatka in 1883 and Henry Allen in 1885. (Webb: 111)

Yukon fable – a tall tale or outlandish story, often represented as having actually happened. (Hitchcock: 400)

Yukon Flats – river flat extending along the Yukon and lower course of the Porcupine River 60 miles east and 120 miles west of Fort Yukon.

Yukon Midnight Sun – Dawson City's first newspaper, established 11 June 1898 and followed five days later by a rival, The Klondike Nugget.

Yukon Portage – the mouth of the Taiya River at the head of Lynn Canal, so designated in the 1180s before it became known as Dyea. (Burlingame: 310)

Yukon sled – sled used to transport supplies, usually by manpower, before and during the Klondike gold rush.

Yukon stove – a box-like sheet metal stove, with collapsible variations, taken north for cooking and heating. Its compact size notwithstanding, one would cook and bake with it for a sizeable party once one acquired the knack.

Yukon strawberry – see Alaskan strawberries. (Lynch: 319)

Yukon Telegraph Lines – constructed 1900-1901, a telegraph linkup between Whitehorse and Quesnel that provided year-round communication from Dawson City to the outside.

Yukon Telegraph Service – established in 1900 to maintain a telegraphic network reaching from Ashcroft, B.C. to Dawson City, Y.T.

Yukon Telephone and Telegraph Syndicate – organized in June, 1897, and followed by the Klondike Telegraph and Telephone Company in July, 1898, to improve communication at Dawson and Grand Forks. (Lynch: 336)

Yukon Territory – formed 1898 from the Northwest Territories, 205,346 square miles in size, with the territorial capital relocated from Dawson to Whitehorse in 1953.